

The Mysterious Monogram

By Howard P. Rocky
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"Good work!" muttered Cornish. "He's doing a bit of dodging."

No sooner had the yacht faded from view, however, than a broad white streak flashed again, penetrating the blackness, and began to swing rapidly from right to left in search of the elusive yacht. Now it caught a glimpse of what it sought, and after a moment's wavering, it shot out straight and the Murita was again plainly discernible.

Once more a shot came from the cutter and Cornish chuckled to himself. Adele sat breathlessly in frightened suspense, and then gave a sigh of relief as the yacht continued calmly on its way.

"They're not trying to hit her, and they won't!" Cornish called over his shoulder to Adele. "Apparently they don't want to take the chance of sinking her and drowning the man they're after. It's a lucky thing for Whitford—and for me too, as I'd hate to lose the Murita!"

For a quarter of an hour the launch raced on, Cornish crowding the staunch little engines to their greatest capacity. Wet and shivering, but with never faltering courage, Adele kept the wheel firm, heading the launch due east on a steady course. Meanwhile the yacht and the pursuing cutter disappeared from view, and all they could see was the occasional flare of the searchlight as it flashed across the waters when the Murita apparently changed her course aptly and momentarily eluded the watch of the other vessel.

Now that the chance of the launch being discovered was extremely remote, Cornish eased up a bit, and for the first time since they had started, turned to glance at the unconscious form behind him. Adele, too, elated at the success of their little strategy, was wondering how Harcourt fared, and called out to her father asking if he could relieve her at the wheel.

Satisfied that the engines were running properly, Cornish arose and made his way cautiously aft. Reaching Harcourt he bent over and looked down at him anxiously. The tarpaulin Cornish had thrown over the earl had kept him dry in spite of the spray, but he lay pale and very still, breathing only faintly. Raising his head, Cornish saw a deep red stain upon Harcourt's temple, and observed with alarm, an ugly gash on the side of his head. Adele could only make them out dimly but she heard her father's exclamation and asked anxiously what was wrong.

"I must have hit him harder than I intended," Cornish said. "I didn't notice that he had such a cut. Wait a minute—I'll come back, and then you can look after him."

Slipping into the seat beside Adele he took the wheel and she made her way quickly to Harcourt's side. She bent close to him trying to see more distinctly, and felt the warm blood upon his face and hair. Hurriedly throwing open her slicker, she tore a strip from her petticoat, and wetting it, carefully washed the wound before staunching the flow of blood as best she could. Then she rudely bandaged the cut and placed the limp head more comfortably.

"Do you think he's badly hurt?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't know," Cornish called back. "I didn't dream of his falling like that. Give him a good drink of this."

Still holding the wheel, Cornish reached into his pocket, and pulling out a big flask, passed it to Adele. She pressed it to Harcourt's lips and poured a generous quantity into his mouth. Gradually his heart began to beat more quickly and his breathing grew more regular, but he did not open his eyes or show any sign of returning consciousness.

"What are we going to do with him now?" she asked in perplexity. "We must get a doctor the minute we land."

"We haven't landed yet," Cornish reminded her, as a great wave threw the launch high upon its crest, and then dropped it down into a deep valley between angry seas that towered high above them on every side. "Take a good pull at that flask yourself, and don't lose your nerve," he added kindly.

"I'm not the least bit frightened," Adele assured him. "I'm only worried about him."

"There's no use worrying," said Cornish. "He's not dead, and I don't think he's seriously hurt. We'll get a doctor, somehow, or, if we can't, I can patch him up when we get ashore. Perhaps it's just as well he is unconscious. It will prevent his making trouble for us, and we'd have difficulty keeping him quiet once we land, if he knew of it."

Not even the occasional flashes of the searchlight broke the blackness now and in another quarter of an

hour, Cornish heard the roar of the surf breaking on the beach. He welcomed it, but he knew that the most difficult part of his work still lay before him. It would be no easy matter to get the launch in through the breakers, and the least accident might result in their being dashed to pieces on the rocks. To beach the launch was the only possible way, however, since he knew they could never get Harcourt ashore if they left the little craft.

Adele sat quietly by Harcourt's side, peering ahead, and then looking down anxiously at the pale face in her lap. Frequently she felt Harcourt's pulse, relieved each time to find it beating faintly. She was perfectly well aware of the danger that lay ahead of them, but she tried bravely to control her nervousness with the remembrance of her father's skill.

At last Cornish could see the white-caps and the dance of the spray as the great waves pounded wildly against the beach. It was still dark, but the rain had ceased and he could see quite a little distance across the water. Eagerly he looked to the right and left along the strand. At first he could see no sign of what he sought, but after a moment or two he swung the wheel sharply and the launch veered about to the north. He did not know what hidden danger might lie in his path, but the course looked clear and the chances seemed in his favor.

Far ahead he saw a break in the line of the raging surf—a narrow strip where the waves rose and fell evenly—and beyond that the wide expanse of a sheltered inlet. Carefully he steered for it. The current was running strong and he held the wheel in a vice-like grip for he knew everything depended upon his making the shelter.

Seeing his purpose Adele watched breathlessly as the launch drew nearer and nearer the haven of safety. Twenty minutes more and the battle was over. Skillfully, Cornish guided the little craft into the sheltered waters, and lashing the wheel firmly, went forward to shut off the engines. Slowly the launch drifted toward the shore. In another moment they felt its keel grate upon the sand and Cornish leaped out, up to his loins in the water, lifting Adele in his arms and carrying her in safety up on the beach.

"I'm proud of you, little girl!" he said. "You're a trump!"

She smiled happily as he turned away and hurried back to the launch for Harcourt. In a moment he was back again and together they went far back from the surf, placing Harcourt tenderly upon the sand.

"I wonder where we are?" Adele said, for it was still too dark to make out their surroundings accurately.

"I don't know exactly," Cornish answered, "but we're somewhere along the Scotch coast. We'll have a look about for a sheltered spot where you can keep him hidden until I get my bearings and find a physician."

CHAPTER XVII.

Footprints in the Sand.

Eager to have Harcourt safely hidden from the gaze of chance wanderers of whoever might lie nearby, Cornish started off on a hurried tour of investigation. He knew it would soon be daylight, and already the darkness was fading. Great clouds rolled seaward, and the wind was a gale, but, although there was no sign of the sun, the storm seemed to be over.

Alert against discovery, Cornish moved cautiously along the beach in the dull gray of the morning. He was elated over the trick he had played the officers of the cutter, but he realized only too well the difficulties that now lay before him. The care of an injured man wanted by the police would be no easy matter, and he was trying his best to invent some plausible reason for their presence on the coast, wet and bedraggled at so early an hour.

Just around a little mound of sand dunes, covered with tall, dark grass, he stopped short. There stood a rude shack or lean-to, apparently a shelter set up by fishermen. The door stood partly open, but there was no sign of life about the place. Kneeling down behind the grass Cornish watched carefully for several minutes. Then, drawing a revolver from his pocket, he slowly approached the hut. He listened, alert for the slightest sound within, but hearing nothing, walked boldly up and looked inside. It was deserted—a hovel devoid of furniture or fittings, and apparently unoccupied.

As he stepped inside, however, he

noticed a change in temperature. It was much warmer than the air outside. The place had a smoky odor, too, and in the far corner he saw a blackened stone with ashes scattered over it. The fire was dead, but the stone was still hot as he stooped down to touch it. Apparently someone had spent the night there and had only recently left, although there was nothing else to indicate that the place had been recently inhabited.

Satisfying himself that whoever might have been there was not now about, Cornish hurried back to Adele. She was weary after the strain of the night, but she smiled brightly when he told her what he had found, and at once arose to accompany him.

Once inside the hut, Adele made a rude bed for Harcourt with the greatcoats of the two men, while Cornish spread out Adele's slicker for her to lie down upon.

"Now I'm going off to find the nearest village," he said when she had stretched herself out with a little sigh. "I'll bring back a doctor if I can find one, and I'm going to telegraph to Sir Harry."

"Isn't that rather dangerous?" Adele asked apprehensively. "Both he and Mr. Carrington are probably being watched by the police in anticipation of just such a communication."

Cornish smiled. "Sir Harry can read the message to MacBee himself if he likes. When I find out where we are I'll send him a message that no one else can understand. I'll sign any name that comes into my head and Sir Harry will be on in a minute."

As Cornish finished speaking, Harcourt stirred uneasily and murmured something faintly. They bent over him and Adele removed the bandage from the wound.

"It doesn't seem to be much of a cut," she said, examining it closely.

"No. The trouble is apparently inside," Cornish answered. "It looks to me like a fractured skull, in which case there's no time to lose. I'm off now." He handed his revolver to Adele. "You'd better have this," he said. "I don't imagine you'll have the slightest use for it, but you'll feel more comfortable with it, here alone."

As she took the weapon she smiled confidently at him. "Don't be anxious, dad. I shall be safe enough. I shan't venture outside as someone might see me if I did."

When her father had gone she sat for a long time looking at Harcourt. He was quiet now and his pulse was beating more evenly. Gradually as she watched him a drowsiness came over her, and as the day brightened she dropped off into a restless sleep.

Several hours passed before she awoke. Then, with a sudden start, and a sense of surprise and fear, she sat up quickly. It was almost dark in the little shanty, but through the cracks in the rough boards she could see the sunlight streaming in. A vague sense of uneasiness gripped her, and she reached out to grasp the revolver at her side. She turned to look at Harcourt, but he lay quietly and she noticed the faint rise and fall of his chest as he breathed evenly.

Although she listened intently, she heard no sound but the roar of the sea and the faint rustling of the tall grass about the hut. But somehow she seemed to feel instinctively the presence of someone lurking outside.

Cautiously she crept toward the rude door and pushed it open a crack, holding the revolver tightly in her hand, ready for instant use. A pistol was a familiar toy in her hand, and she had the confidence of knowing that she could use it well, but there was no one within the range of her vision. Then, as her eyes dropped to the sand before the door, she started violently and a little tremor passed through her tense body.

Drawing back hastily, she pulled the door nearly shut and peered about its edge. There on the sand directly in front of the shack were a man's tracks, and within reach of her hand was the impression of a great bare foot.

She was positive they had not been there when she had entered with her father, and a feeling of nervousness came over her. The footprints might be that of a wandering fisherman, but it seemed more likely to her that someone had opened the door and looked in, and it occurred to her that his doing so might have awakened her. Even now he might be concealed behind the sand dunes close by.

Leaning back against the shanty wall, she thought for a moment. Then, as the uncertainty grew too great to bear, she boldly threw open the door and stepped out, her finger firmly pressed against the trigger of the revolver. She glanced about quickly, but saw nothing to arouse further suspicion. Still she was not

satisfied. Advancing a few steps farther she passed out to the flat stretch of beach and looked down toward the inlet where they had landed. A little cry escaped her as she saw the launch they had left there putting slowly out through the narrow channel. Three figures were crouching down in the stern and in the bottom of the boat she could see some heavy bale-like object. The launch was outside the inlet now and was swinging about to the north, where there was a sharp bluff marking an abrupt turn in the coast.

Spellbound, she stood looking after the little craft, unable to understand the meaning of what she saw or to figure out who could be making off in that way. She could only see the backs of the three men and they were now too far away for her to have recognized them even if their faces had been turned toward her.

Suddenly, as she watched, she became conscious of a figure coming from the left, down close by the water's edge. Just as she turned to look in that direction a second figure appeared and she saw them both pointed excitedly after the launch.

Then the two started off up the beach on a run. Fascinated she stood watching them hurry along, curious as to what it all meant, and not in the least frightened. There seemed to be something strangely familiar about one of the men, but at first she could not make out what it was. In another moment, however, his identity flashed across her mind, and she knew the man was MacBee.

The recognition gave her a start, as she realized the danger of his presence. She gave no thought to the reasons of his being there, nor to who he might be pursuing in the escaping launch. Her one thought was to keep Harcourt concealed, and she closed the door hurriedly, barring it as best she could with the rough stick that served for a bolt.

Peering through the boards she watched the inspector and his companion, who were still running rapidly. In another moment they had disappeared around the bluff and, with the launch, were concealed from view. When they had gone she turned to look at Harcourt, lying helpless and unconscious of it all. For the first time she felt glad that he could not know, for she realized that she could not have kept him there if he had been able to see MacBee. In spite of her efforts she felt sure he would have stepped out and given himself up promptly.

For another hour she sat quietly, watching and waiting, dreading every moment that the detective might return. The seemingly endless time slipped by, and gradually the daylight began to fade. As the darkness came on her fears increased, and although it was growing colder now, she hesitated to light a fire lest it betray their presence in the hut. Several times she felt for the matches in her father's greatcoat, but each time she resisted the temptation although she had seen nothing of MacBee since the morning.

Nervous and shivering, she sat huddled in the corner, anxious too for Harcourt, who should have been in a doctor's hands long ago. Now she heard someone approaching, and hurriedly caught up her slicker to throw it over Harcourt. This done, she crouched down in the corner opposite the door and waited, resting the revolver upon her knee.

There was someone just outside the door now, and every nerve in her slender body was trembling, but she did not move and scarcely dared to breathe. Someone touched the latch of the door and rattled it and her heart gave a great jump. Then, from behind the sand dunes she heard a familiar whistle, and she knew that her father was approaching.

The rattling of the latch ceased abruptly and she heard a smothered exclamation through the thin walls. In another instant she heard a faint swishing sound as some one darted through the tall grass, and a moment later Cornish's voice called to her.

Jumping up quickly she threw open the door and fell sobbing into her father's arms.

(To be continued.)

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